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About "Ridge Bachao Abhiyan"

Human Chain formed on 22nd Jan 06

**Contact:
9899812888/9212061046/9818266471**



Vasant Kunj, Vasant Vihar & Munirka residents made a Human Chain to protest against exploitation of ground water and construction of illegal malls in their area; they cried for their water and called for MCD Bulldozers.

The Issue

The Vasant Kunj Malls in the protected Ridge/Forest area are TOTALLY illegal. They have no environmental clearances whatsoever. The constructions should not even have started. Maruti Udyog has been served by a notice to stop construction. Seeing all documents anyone can understand that this is an attempt to exploit this area for commercial and financial gains. DDA is playing totally foul. Vasant Kunj is infamous for water shortage, these complexes will further increase the problem.

Army has been constructing in this area since 1994 and its latest housing project aims to eliminate the shortage of accommodation in Delhi for its officers and men by 2007. The Ridge under Army faces complete elimination. Army has not heeded any court order either.

Maps are available, media has been covering it and people have objected.

Nature, once destroyed, cannot be retrieved; Ridge being oldest natural heritage in Delhi, we are fighting for it. Read on for details; Join us by mailing at diw_s@yahoo.com.

Details....

About the Ridge

The Delhi Ridge, part of the Aravalli range of hills, extending from North campus, Delhi University to Mt. Abu in Rajasthan. This is about 2.4 billion years old, one of the oldest geological structure on earth, almost half the age of earth. It existed on Indian land mass when it moved north all the way from Antarctica. Comparing to it, the Himalayas and the Ganges are only a recent formation. Its only when the Indian subcontinent clashed with the Chinese mainland that the Himalayas were formed, about 60 millions years ago. Rich in biodiversity of its own kind, it is the oldest natural heritage of this country.

In 1807, the Britishers prepared a [map](#) of Delhi and clearly marked the ridge, which spanned the territory of Delhi from north to south continuously. After shifting the capital to Delhi, they earmarked the ridge for conservation, to serve as green lungs for the city and also planted trees on it.

After Independence the ridge seemed to be continuously erased. It has been totally erased in Karol Bagh and Pahar Ganj area. At many other places it has been encroached so much that it is been left only in patches. Under law, it has been earmarked as green cover of the city. But it seems to be only on paper. In reality, the very govt. agencies entrusted with its protection are the ones encroaching, and that too for commercial interests. Everyday new encroachments are coming to our notice.

The major encroachment we would like to mention is construction of shopping malls and hotel by the DDA (in 315 Ha under its control) and housing colony by the Army (in 325 Ha under its control) on 640 hectares of ridge area falling between Vasant Kunj, Vasant Vihar and Mahipalpur. All environmental laws are being violated, which have also been pointed by various statutory committees. But the Govt. seems to have turned a deaf ear to all pleas.

Saving the Ridge

Ridge Bachao Abhiyan is the movement against the destruction of our priceless natural heritage – the Vasant Kunj - Mahipalpur – Vasant Vihar Ridge forest.

Groups involved are:

- Delhi Univ Students for Civic & Natural Environment (DUSCNE): Students from Campus Law Centre, Hindu College, Ramjas College and Motilal Nehru College have been most active.
- Citizens for Preservation of Quarries and Lakes

Wilderness (CPQLW),
 - Ridge Bachao Andolan ([Chetna](#), [Parivartan](#), [Nyayabhoomi](#), Kisley, Lok Jagriti, Delhi Minority Welfare Association),
 - Vasant Kunj Water Protection Front of RWAs and NGOs.

This area has a complete conservation status as such:

- **Ridge, by the [Geological Survey of India \(1997\)](#)**: Protected by the Master Plan
- **Forest, by the [Forest Department \(Delhi Government 1997\)](#)** : No non forest activity permitted.
- **A "[Water Recharge Area](#)", by The Central Groundwater Authority (1997)** : No construction or water withdrawal permitted

We demand a complete halt to this destruction of our precious environment!!

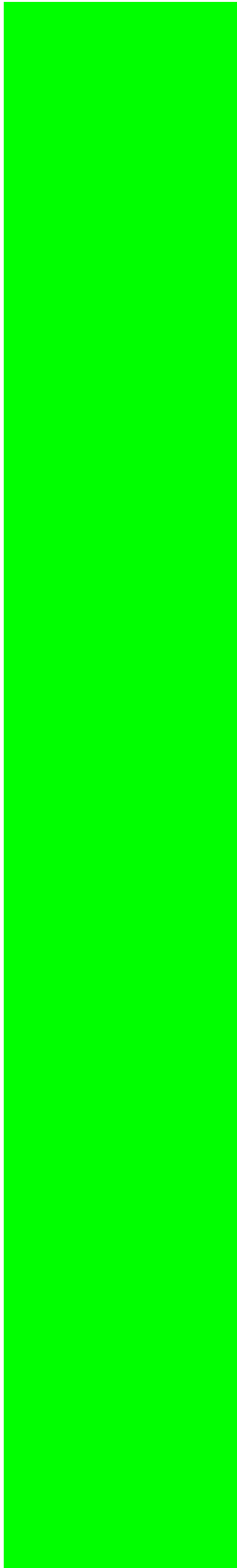
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Events and Dates

The Delhi Ridge, which stood the onslaught of all ice ages, dinosaurs and invaders has finally succumbed to DDA.

Date/Year	Event
2.5 billion yrs BC	Delhi Ridge as part of Aravalli Range drifts apart from Antarctica and African continent.
60 million yrs BC	The Ridge witness the birth of Himalayas and The Ganges.
AD 1807	Britishers prepare Delhi Map highlighting the Ridge as a continuous structure from Wazirabad to Tuglukabad.
AD 1000-1800	Delhi Ridge serves as home to seven cities of Delhi.
AD 1950s	Master Plan 1962 prepared by DDA and area in question shown as Reserved Forest and Rocky Quarries , with no development proposed.
1985	Army given 325 Ha of Ridge land for the purpose of exercises. In lieu of land taken from Army for IGI Airport.
1994	Loveraj Kumar Committee (LKC) constituted to suggest management pattern of entire Delhi Ridge. LKC expresses reservations on DDA's role in

	excluding some bona fide parts of Ridge from its maps. (Refer pages 13 & 14 of Shekhar Singh (CEC) Report).
1995	Unison Hotels Ltd (presently Hotel Grand) allotted 4 Ha on this Ridge.
1995	DDA starts construction of a road through Ridge connecting Vasant Kunj and Vasant Vihar. On intervention of High Court this road was stayed and cancelled on environmental grounds.
1996	DDA announces International Hotels Complex (13 Luxury Hotels) on this area.
13 Sept 1996	In response to Kuldeep Nayyar's letter Supreme Court (A three judge bench) passes an order staying all the constructions in the 315 Ha under DDA. SC orders constitution of Env Impact Assessment Authority (EIAA) which would decide Env status of the area and decide the fate of the project (EIAA is a Central Govt. Authority).
Oct 1996	EIAA constituted under Chairmanship of Justice (Retd) R K Shukla.
1997	EIAA summons GSI and Forest Dept, Delhi Govt . The area is confirmed as Ridge and Forest respectively. All constructions in DDA area are ordered cancelled.
18 Feb 1997	Petition by Hotel Grand for release of 4 Ha dismissed in SC.
18 Mar 1997	Petition filed by Hotel Grand for release of 4 Ha dismissed in Delhi HC.
06 May 1997	Once again petition filed by Hotel Grand in SC.
19 Aug 1997	A two judge bench of CJI J S Verma and Justice B N Kripal modifies the earlier three judge bench judgement of 13 Sept 1996, permitting constructions in 92 Ha subject to environmental clearances, all requirement of laws and measures to check



	<p>pollution.</p> <p>SURPRISE 1: What did this did this order exempt? As all existing laws (highlighted above) continue to apply!!</p> <p>SURPRISE 2: Hotel Grand asked exemption of 4 Ha, instead 92 Ha 'APPEARED' released.</p> <p>SURPRISE 3: The order of 13 Sept 1996 by a THREE Judge Bench could not have been modified by a TWO Judge Bench as a matter of judicial discipline at any cost.</p>
1997	DDA misconstrues the above order and gives go ahead to Hotel Grand to start construction.
1997	EIAA orders DDA to stop Hotel Grand construction. Construction of Hotel Grand stopped immediately.
07 & 13 Jan 1998	EIAA dissolved by SC ' termining ' it as an ad hoc (???) committee??? And matter transferred to Env Pollution (Prevention) Control Authority (EPCA) for NCR
1998	With EIAA gone Hotel Grand gets on with its construction spree
20 Apr 1998	NGO Chetna challenges 19 Aug 1997 order in SC.
Dec 1998	Papers from EIAA finally reaches EPCA. Hotel Grand on verge of completion.
	Hotel Grand starts. Its tube wells are illegal till date (Jan 2006)
10 May 1999	Petition filed by Chetna got placed before a Bench headed by Justice B N Kripal and dismissed. NOTE: HOW could Justice B N Kripal have headed the Bench for review of his OWN order?! A gross miscarriage of justice.

1999	No less eager to seize the day, Army constructs a housing colony (Shankar Vihar) in some portion of 325 Ha under its control.
1999	Kuldeep Nayyar, MP, raised matter in Rajya Sabha. George Fernandes denies construction on the Ridge.
14 May 1999	CPQLW writes to Army HQs to stop illegal constructions on the Ridge. Press conference called by CPQLW, in which Army was blasted by media for destroying the ridge.
07 Jun 1999	Army writes back that they have confirmed from GSI that it is not Ridge. A blatant lie!
2000	EPCA gives it finding that Hotel Grand is illegal and leaves it for SC to take the decision of relocating it.
Nov 2003	DDA announces auction of Vasant Kunj land for Shopping malls.
Dec 2003	Army starts with another binge of construction.
Jan 2004	CPQLW files petition with CEC (a statutory body of SC for forest matters) in SC in protest against Army constructions and auction of malls.
Jul 2004	Shekhar Singh, as a special invitee of CEC, confirms the conservation status of the area and terms all constructions illegal.
07 July 2004	Notification by MoEF making env clearance from Central govt. mandatory for all projects above Rs 50 crores.
Sep 2004	Builders start constructions of malls. No clearances sought.
Apr - June 2005	Builders apply for consent from DPCC.
May 2005	DPCC issues notice to Maruti Udyog to stop construction as no clearances have been given. DPCC directs all builders to furnish more required documents.
28 Nov 2005	DPCC issues Public Notice in

	news papers inviting objections/suggestions from public.
Jan 2006	Second floor of Malls being constructed - NO CLEARANCES EXIST from Forest Dept., CGWA (Ground Water) & MoEF.

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Is it Ridge?

Geological Survey of India (GSI) says YES it is.

It seems DDA was not sure of the status of this area as Ridge and so it went ahead with the Intl Hotels Complex project in 1996 in this area.

As a consequence of Shri. Kuldeep Nayyar's letter to Supreme Court and petition filed by CPQLW, SC stayed this project and ordered the environmental status of the area be determined by formation of a Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (EIAA).

On Jul 15, 1997 GSI submitted its report as asked by EIAA, confirming the status of this area as Ridge, an extension of Aravalli Range. Report - [page1](#), [page2](#), [page3](#), [page4](#), [map](#).

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Is it Forest Area?

Dept. of Forest, Delhi Govt. says YES it is.

It seems DDA was not sure of the status of this area as Forest and so it went ahead with the Intl Hotels Complex project in 1996 in this area.

As a consequence of Shri. Kuldeep Nayyar's letter to Supreme Court and petition filed by CPQLW, SC stayed this project and ordered the environmental status of the area be determined by formation of a Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (EIAA).

On Jul 31, 1997, Shri M A Arfi, the then Secretary (Environment), Delhi Govt., submitted his report to EIAA confirming the area to be a Forest area ([page1](#), [page2](#)), carrying Aravalli vegetation enjoying protection under Forest Conservation Act, 1980 as interpreted by Dec 12, 1996 judgment of

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Is it Water Recharge Area?

According to Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA), YES.

In Dec 2003, DDA auctioned land in this area for construction of Malls. CPQLW petitioned CEC (statutory body of Supreme Court). CEC asked CGWA to give its report.

On Jun 10, 2004, CGWA stated (page1, page2, page3) that this area is indeed a "Water Recharge Area" for the underlying aquifers in the vicinity and development activities may adversely effect the ground water regime in the area.

The report also states that "... the fractured, weathered rocks allow 85% percolation of rainwater". This is highest possible for any area. That is the reason that ground water in this area is sweet and gets saline as one goes far, say towards Pappankalan.

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Is DDA God and above all laws?

DDA seemed to have its eyes set on the area in question since early 1990's.

In 1994, Loveraj Kumar Committee (LKC) was constituted to suggest management pattern of entire Delhi Ridge. LKC expresses reservations on DDA's role in excluding some bona fide parts of Ridge from its maps. (Refer pages 13 & 14 of [Shekhar Singh \(CEC\) Report](#)).

DDA did not submit complete maps to Loveraj Kumar Committee. As a result many areas which were bona fide Ridge, like this area, were left out of notification.

In 1995, DDA starts constructing a road through this Ridge. It was stopped after intervention of Delhi HC.

In 1996, DDA, not having learnt its lesson and still bent upon exploiting this area, announces an International Hotels Complex project of 13 luxury hotels.

On Dec 12, 1996, a landmark judgment was

passed by Supreme Court for the conservation of forests of this country. It was held that forest areas, even though not notified, but forest by dictionary meaning will enjoy protection under Forest Conservation Act, 1980. All states were directed to appoint committees to identify such forest areas and submit the list to Supreme Court.

The committee in Delhi sought the information on such forest areas in Delhi from MCD, Delhi Cantt Board, NDMC, DDA, PWD, Railways, etc. The ONLY agency not to submit this list was DDA???. The Chief Conservator of Forests, Delhi Govt., filed an affidavit ([page1](#), [page2](#) see [page3](#)) in SC blaming DDA for not giving the list of such forest areas under its control.

As a consequence of this inaction (*dadagiri*) by DDA many such areas escaped protection and DDA having its field day by developing them on its whims and fancies.

In 1998, DDA closes its eyes to illegal construction of Hotel Grand.

2003 saw the auctioning of the biggest mall project in NCR, on the Ridge, by the DDA, again illegal.

Present: The malls continue to be constructed without any clearances.

The area we are talking about is one such area!

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Have these malls got ANY Environmental Clearances? - NO

Reply from Dept of Forest, Delhi Govt

The 640 Ha of this Ridge area is a bona fide forest (enjoying protection under Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and Supreme Court Judgment dt 12/12/1996) with **NO NON FOREST ACTIVITY PERMITTED**. Reply received through Right to Information Act from Forest Dept. Delhi Govt shows that no permission has been sought from them by [Army](#), [DDA](#), [Malls Builders and other parties](#).

Reply from Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA)

In April 1999 CGWA marked this area as Water Notified Area, prohibiting installation of any ground water abstraction structures. [Reply from CGWA](#) states NO PERMISSION HAS BEEN GIVEN given to the Malls.

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Letter of CGWA to CEC ([page1](#), [page2](#), [page3](#)) states that this area is a vital "Water Recharge Area" for the surroundings colonies like Vasant Kunj, Vasant Vihar, Mahipalpur, where no more development should take place and pumping of ground water not allowed

Reply from Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC)

As per July 7, 2004 Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification amendment, any project above Rs 50 crores need environmental clearance from Min of Env and Forest, Govt. of India. For this clearance DPCC is required to invite public objections/suggestions/comments and conduct public hearing. No such environmental clearance has been given as yet. DPCC issued such a [Public Notice on Nov 28, 2005](#) and is yet to conduct a public hearing. **BUT, the constructions are going on since Sept 2004.**

[Reply](#) received through Right to Information Act, from DPCC states that the builders have no environmental clearance as mentioned above. DPCC has also served [notice to Maruti Udyog to stop construction](#) with immediate effect.

The fact that application for consent by builders were submitted only in April 2005 and after, and yet to be granted any clearance show that the constructions going on are COMPLETELY/TOTALLY/LOGICALLY illegal.

Builder	Consent applied on	Show cause notice by DPCC
Maruti Udyog	Apr 13, 2005 (Click for copy)	May 30, 2005 (Click for copy)
Regency Park Mgmt Services	Apr 27, 2005 (Click for copy)	May 31, 2005 (Click for copy)
Ambience Developers	May 17, 2005 (Click for copy)	May 31, 2005 (Click for copy)
Beverly Park Maintenance Service Ltd	Jun 3, 2005 (Click for copy)	Aug 29, 2005

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